

CALEB EMERSON, NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER OF MARIETTA, OHIO

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INTRODUCTION

Caleb Emerson, born on 21 August 1779 in Ashby, Massachusetts, followed the path of many adventurous New Englanders intent on making their mark in the new Northwest Territory just being settled west of the Allegheny Mountains. His father, Timothy Emerson, had died before Caleb's ninth birthday, having lost his health during the Revolutionary War and most of his property to the republic's worthless continental currency.¹ Caleb's mother, Mary Felch Emerson (Timothy Emerson's first of three wives), had died six weeks after Caleb's birth.

Caleb Emerson was raised by Samuel and Elizabeth Smith of Mason, New Hampshire, neither of whom were related to the Emersons. One might reasonably conclude that the Smiths are deserving of at least some of the credit for the positive direction young Caleb's life took. Emerson pursued the study of law in Amherst where he apparently encountered his mentor, James Elliott, a lawyer from Brattleborough, Vermont. Stronger evidence of the Smiths' beneficent influence is manifested in the fact that Emerson would name his second daughter Elizabeth Smith Emerson. (His first daughter was named Mary, presumably after his mother. Interestingly, none of his four sons were named after either his natural or adoptive fathers.)² While in Amherst, Emerson also served as assistant editor for John Cushing's weekly newspaper, *The Farmer's Cabinet*,³ which began publication in 1802. It was his association with Elliott, however, that would lead him to Ohio.

James Elliott's workbook him to the nation's new capital, then referred to as Washington City. Between the years 1802 and 1808 Emerson developed an interest in both the western territory of Ohio and the conservative politics of Alexander Hamilton's Federalist Party. Elliott kept Emerson informed of activities in Congress, and apparently facilitated his relocation to Ohio by contacting the state's first governor, Edward Tiffin (1803-07), concerning admission to the Ohio bar. Tiffin informed Elliott that it was not necessary for Emerson to appear in person before the Ohio judges in session. Rather, he could apply to the judges separately for certification.

With the assistance of James Elliott, Emerson was able to fortify his application for admission to the Ohio bar with impressive documentation. Former Secretary of State and Postmaster General Timothy Pickering⁴ provided Emerson with a letter of introduction. Although not personally acquainted with him, Pickering wrote that he trusted the 'handsome recommendation of a gentleman [Elliott?] in whose discernment and correctness... and personal knowledge of Mr. Emerson I entirely confide'. Pickering referred to Emerson's 'irreproachable moral and industrious habits', his political acumen 'equal to anyone of his standing', and his

'correctness as a writer'. In addition, Emerson was declared to be 'a firm Federalist' who had supported the cause in writing while residing in New Hampshire. Pickering closed by asking Ohio Company organizer and Marietta founder, General Rufus Putnam, the favour of introducing Emerson to other Marietta gentlemen who may be useful 'in facilitating his professional pursuits'.⁵

Paul Fearing, probate judge and (Federalist) territorial representative to Congress in 1801-03, supplied Emerson with a letter in 1809 recommending his admission to the bar. Declaring the applicant to be a 'man of talents [*sic*] and information',⁶ it is likely one of the last such letters Emerson obtained, for he opened his law office in Marietta at about the same time.

During his forty-four years in Marietta, Caleb Emerson would leave his mark as publisher, journalist, bookseller, lawyer, historian, abolitionist and Baptist minister. Indeed, when one also considers the manner in which Emerson used the pages of his newspapers to inform his subscribers of developments in emerging disciplines such as education, agronomy and animal science, it becomes apparent that his influence on the town was broad and profound. If his activities had not served to leave a lasting impression on the populace, it is likely his character would have. Contemporary accounts depict Emerson as an original whose personal characteristics and habits were uninfluenced by fashion or fad. He may well have appeared older than he was, belonging to another era, because he was too concerned with substance to worry about style. Perhaps Washington County's historians said it best when they described Emerson as 'one of the best known characters, and one of the ablest men, Marietta ever possessed...'.⁷

THE WESTERN SPECTATOR

One year after Caleb Emerson's arrival in Marietta, the town's newspaper, *The Marietta Gazette and Virginia Herald*, failed due to lack of subscribers, its property liquidated at a sheriff's sale. Published by lawyers Wyllys Silliman and Elijah Backus (1801-05) and printer Samuel Fairlamb (1805-10), the *Gazette* had been a small, rather expensive newspaper (\$2.50 a year) consisting entirely of national and foreign news (two months old), and legal/official advertisements. Politically, the paper had supported Thomas Jefferson's Democratic Republicans.

Even before the struggling *Gazette* officially ceased publication, Marietta's Federalists launched *The Western Spectator* on 23 October 1810. Viewed as the successor to the *Gazette* by the town's newspaper readership, the *Spectator* would be the first in a series of conservatively-oriented (Federalist/ Whig) papers which would successfully serve the Marietta community for the next ninety-six years. The *American Friend* (1833-42), *Marietta Gazette* (1833-42), *Marietta Intelligencer* (1839-62) and *Marietta Register* (1862-1906) were all part of this family.⁸ Chosen as the *Spectator's* editor was Caleb Emerson: newly-transplanted New Hampshire attorney, settled in the community (married to Mary Dana, daughter of Captain William Dana of neighbouring Belpre, on 29 July 1810), and a strong Federalist with previous newspaper experience (at *The Farmer's Cabinet*).

In physical appearance the *Spectator* differed little from the *Gazette*. A small four-page, four-column weekly, the *Spectator* was printed every Tuesday by Joseph Israel for Caleb Emerson. Each issue bore the motto 'Be Just and Fear Not'. Subscribers were pleased to be charged only \$2.00 a year if they paid in advance. The \$2.50 annual fee of the old *Gazette* was assessed only if subscribers wished to pay every six months. Readers who waited until the end of the year to pay were charged \$3.00. Unlike the *Gazette*, local news received at least some

attention, occasionally under the heading 'Marietta News'. Flooding, a frequent problem in a town situated between the Ohio and Muskingum rivers, was reported in this manner in an early number. The article described the damage and compared its severity to previous inundations.⁹ Similarly, the *Spectator* reported the confusion caused by an earthquake in the early morning of 16 December 1811. Local residents had at first imagined they were being attacked by Indians.¹⁰

Local businesses were more prominently featured in the *Spectator's* pages than they had been in the old *Gazette*. Advertisements went well beyond the merely legal/official, likely reflecting both the growing commercial atmosphere and the sense that this paper truly belonged to the community. Indeed, when farrier Samuel Nichols (who also cured pole-evil, fistula, naval-gall and other horse complaints), boot and shoe maker Christian B. Smith, and the dry goods concern Stone & Co. all featured detailed advertisements in one issue, Emerson complained that the 'unexpected press of ads' caused the exclusion of additional foreign news.¹¹ Of course, such strictures did not dissuade either editor Emerson or printer Israel from placing their own advertisements - the former for a small bookstore he operated adjacent to the newspaper office, and the latter for his book bindery where the proprietor paid cash for sheep skins dressed suitably for his purposes.

In truth, space was a serious problem for Emerson. Speaking to the readership on the occasion of the paper's half-year anniversary, Emerson acknowledged the difficulty involved in the 'selection and compression' of articles dealing with various, diversified, and complicated' subjects. Thanking subscribers for the patronage he had received (though maybe it was less than hoped for), the editor feared that the product might be less than worthy due to the difficulties encountered. Progress, however slow, would be achieved, Emerson predicted, although it would be surely easier to fill the pages of a daily newspaper, given the luxury of space. While Emerson was opening his paper's pages to news of local interest, sensationalism was to be afforded no coverage: To those who complain for want of a sufficient number of murders, robberies, horrid catastrophes and doleful doings, we must humbly plead in justification, first that we take no delight in these things ourselves and knew not but our readers might be all equally indifferent and secondly, that as we have no right to kill or maim or rob or even to invent stories... those who relish them must blame people and not us for not breaking their necks and making sad tidings'.¹²

Included in Emerson's review of the *Spectator's* first six months was a defence of the newspaper's anti-Bonaparte stance: 'To democrats who complain of harshness we answer that criticism of Bonaparte tyranny is not criticism of our administration'. Understandably, much of the *Spectator's* news coverage was devoted to the hostilities in Europe which would shortly involve America in the War of 1812 with Britain. Never a political extremist, Emerson did not allow his paper to become a forum for Federalists who viewed President James Madison as a French puppet. Instead, the *Spectator* argued against the administration's partiality toward the French, maintaining that Bonaparte's continental system was undeserving of American support. Why were French transgressions on American shipping any more palatable than British?¹³ As the United States moved towards war in the summer of 1812, Emerson decried the secretive congressional sessions which produced the war vote. Once war was declared, however, the *Spectator* was quick to condemn excesses by extremists on both sides, such as the attack on the pro-British *Federal Republican* newspaper office in Baltimore (characterized as 'Robespierrian horror') or the furious reaction of some Ohio Federalists to Chillicothe's public celebration of the war declaration.¹⁴

Lacking the resources to dispatch its own correspondents to the site of newsworthy

events, many of the news articles contained in the *Spectator* were excerpted from other publications such as *The Philadelphia Register*, *The New York Evening Post* and *The Richmond Enquirer*. In his message to readers on 23 May 1812 (p.2), Emerson pledged 'to make the *Western Spectator* more ... worthy of patronage, and ... labor to give it the variety requisite to the gratification of diversified tastes in the mass of Newspaper readers'. In its second year, the paper had changed. Thomas G. Ransom, soon to be the publisher of the *American Friend*, replaced Joseph Israel as printer. Some sensationalism had in fact made its appearance in the *Spectator's* pages as Emerson quietly detailed the cases in Washington County's Court of Common Pleas (including the amount of fines assessed and number of lashes administered).¹⁵ Greater diversity was manifest-poetry regularly appeared (intended for the distaff readership); occasional scientific articles were offered (such as an eclipse of the sun as seen at Marietta on 17 September 1811); and anti-slavery essays were regularly featured. Emerson's dislike for the 'peculiar institution' was well known and was to be reflected in both the *Spectator* and the *Gazette*. As early as 5 March 1811 the *Spectator's* reaction to a brief slave rebellion in New Orleans was to condemn both 'villainous blacks and MORE VILLAINOUS WHITES who have reduced to the level of beasts of the field these unhappy Africans - and are now obliged to sacrifice them like beasts in self-preservation! The day of vengeance is coming!' (p.1). More thoughtfully, 'Essays on Slavery' No. VI reflected on the 'private evils' which resulted from a system in which honest labour was thought to be fit only for slaves.¹⁶

Unfortunately, it appears that the *Spectator's* patronage never reached the level necessary for long-term viability. In the spring of 1813 the paper was sold to David Everett, Timothy and Daniel H. Buell who, with Thomas Ransom, began publication of the *American Friend*.

BOOKSELLING

While editing the *Western Spectator*, Caleb Emerson operated a small bookstore adjacent to the newspaper office. Emerson's supplier was Philip Houlbrooke Nicklin, a Baltimore book dealer. Nicklin was a native of Philadelphia and a Princeton College graduate (1804) who had begun selling books in 1809. Under the pen name 'Peregrine Prolix' he would later appear as the author of such works as the alliterative *A Pleasant Peregrination Through the Prettiest Parts of Pennsylvania* (1836), *Letters Descriptive of Virginia Springs* (1835), and *Remarks on Literary Property* (1838). Although their relationship did not appear to be one of great profitability, Emerson and Nicklin's correspondence is illustrative of the problems and pressures encountered by those who tried to deal in books on the American frontier.

Nicklin recognized that Emerson's position as both a Marietta newspaper editor and bookseller was potentially advantageous because it afforded one the 'fine opportunity of puffing your books in your own paper'. It was hoped that Emerson's advertisements would appeal to Ohio's new attorneys, for Nicklin was stocking up on legal tomes which would 'teach... lawyers to pick their clients' pockets'.¹⁷ Of course, Nicklin himself was able to benefit from the publicity Emerson could provide as the *Spectator's* editor. When the Baltimore bookseller decided to publish the short-lived *American Review of History and Politics*, intended 'to propagate sound political doctrines and improve American literary tastes', he advertised in Emerson's newspaper. Readers were informed that the quarterly would cover European and American relations (of vital interest as war approached). Subscriptions would be accepted at the *Spectator* office at the cost of \$6.00 per year.

Numerous difficulties arose to plague the Emerson/Nicklin business arrangement. Roads

and waterways needed to be negotiated slowly and with care. As a result, goods being shipped often arrived late and in less than perfect condition. Emerson complained to one of his customers in Athens County that Nicklin was not meeting his needs: 'Our books have at length arrived ... the globes were so carelessly packed that they are ruined'.¹⁸ Emerson's principal competition was the firm of Patterson & Hopkins in Pittsburgh, which appeared to be underselling him (although Nicklin would not accept that as fact). Marietta's remoteness also worked against Emerson. Musician and music teacher Andrew Law (1748-1821) refused to send any of his instructional books, such as the popular *Harmonic Companion* (1807), that far on commission. It must have been frustrating to Emerson that Law admitted to consulting with Patterson & Hopkins before making his decision.¹⁹ General opinion held that it would be a while before America's pioneers of the Northwest Territory acquired a taste for cultural pursuits. Nicklin quoted an acquaintance in Boston who stated that the 'boors in Ohio ... a thousand miles from the ocean' could make no use of books.²⁰

Emerson's missives to Nicklin contain frequent complaints about being overcharged for books, volumes missing from shipments, and demands for payment in full (when Emerson's customers were always late in payments due to him). Nicklin, in turn, was in need of cash and therefore reluctant to extend Emerson further credit. After not hearing from Emerson for several months, Nicklin announced that he wished to close his accounts in Marietta. There was, he declared, no profit in it.²¹ Nicklin reconsidered, however, and the relationship continued another year until Emerson's tenure with the *Spectator* ended in 1813. In order to pay off his \$1,500 debt, Emerson gave Nicklin title to 1,200 acres of land in Athens County near Ohio University.²²

Throughout the period of Emerson's association with Nicklin, advertisements in the *Western Spectator* informed the readership of books available for purchase. These included Thomas Browne's *Dictionary of Ancient Classical and Scriptural Proper Names*; John Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*; Mark Akenside's *Poetical Works*; *The Works of Rev. Henry Scougal*; Samuel Johnson's *History of Rasselas* and *The Rambler*; Washington Irving's *Salmagundi*; and James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Bibles and testaments were plentiful, as were dictionaries - both English and foreign-language (Greek, Latin and French). The sciences were not forgotten (Lavoisier on chemistry, Darwin on botany and Sir Astley Cooper on surgery), nor was literature (Milton and Cowper). Legal tomes on law practice, pleadings, partnership and patents (by Burrow, Chitty, Tidd and Graydon) and school-books (Dilworth's *Arithmetic* and Webster's *Spelling*) were offered. Emerson's bookstore may have been small, but its holdings were fairly comprehensive.

LAW AND RELIGION

Caleb Emerson closed his bookstore a few months after the *Spectator* was bought out in the spring of 1813, but he continued to supply books to interested persons and groups on an individual basis. In 1814 he was offered the opportunity to return to bookselling on a larger scale when Philip Nicklin's Baltimore competitor, Joseph Cushing, offered to supply Emerson with \$1,500 worth of books in return for Ohio land²³ - a repeat of the arrangement Emerson had made almost two years earlier in discharging his obligations to Nicklin. There is no indication that Emerson agreed. Cushing, whose advertisements had also appeared in Emerson's *Western Spectator*, enjoyed sufficient success in Baltimore to spur Nicklin's relocation to Philadelphia in January 1813.

Religious organizations and tract societies called on Emerson to supply them with

suitable books, relying on his judgement as a Baptist minister as well as a book dealer to select appropriate titles. One such customer indicated that his society's library already included a number of religious classics of the day: Joseph Alleine's *Solemn Warnings of the Dead, An Admonition to Unconverted Sinners*; Joseph Bellamy's *Eternal Life*; Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*; and John Wesley's *Sermons*.²⁴

Emerson devoted more time to his law practice after the demise of the *Spectator*. One finds his legal notices prominently announced in the *American Friend*, successor to the *Western Spectator*. Shortly before Emerson's bookstore closed, it was the site of an auction which offered for sale the collection of deceased Marietta resident Timothy E. Danielson, whose estate Emerson was administering. Titles offered to the highest bidder included the legal treatises of William Selwyn and Isaac Espinasse; a seven-volume collection of Shakespeare's works; the works of Rousseau in French; Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*; and the ubiquitous Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

Emerson was appointed Prosecuting Attorney for Washington County in February 1815, a post he would occupy for the next six years. He continued to maintain his private practice as well, representing persons who would help establish some of Marietta's basic institutions. In the autumn of 1815 Emerson represented Benjamin Corp as he petitioned for divorce from his wife, 'complaining Mary hath committed [the] crime of Adultery'.²⁶ Eight years later, Benjamin Corp would establish Marietta's first Sunday School, and in 1824 he would build the town's first Methodist church. (The twenty-five feet square structure would have to be sliced in half and enlarged to 25 × 40 feet after the first meeting.)²⁷

Between 1820-22 Emerson was beset by personal misfortune. In October 1820 his house in Marietta, on Front Street between Scammell and Worcester, was destroyed by fire. His personal papers were lost in the conflagration. On 9 October a meeting at the Marietta courthouse resulted in the formation of a relief committee charged with soliciting materials and labour for the construction of a small frame house to shelter the Emerson family. Contributions of clothing and furniture were also requested. The committee, headed by David and J. R. Putnam, quickly published a donors' list which included committeeman D. Putnam (\$30.00 in cash); Paul Fearing (\$11.00 in cloth); Ephraim Cutler (\$7.50 in pine shingles); *American Friend* co-owner Timothy Buell (\$2.50 in cash, \$5.00 in timber); and additional contributions of bricks, boards and nails.²⁸

In 1822 Emerson fell gravely ill as 'The Fever' struck many Marietta residents. The town's proximity to the Ohio and Muskingum rivers was generally believed to be the cause of the illness. Citizens spoke with trepidation about the 'miasmatic influences of the Ohio shore'.²⁹ Emerson associated his near-fatal sickness with the pressures of his law practice. Consequently, he turned away from the law and towards the Baptist Church. A licensed preacher, Emerson became active in spreading the message of his faith through dissemination of the Baptist General Tract Society's publications. He purchased copies of the Society's eighty-one different tracts, each four to forty pages in length, through agents in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and sold them locally.³⁰ Titles included *The Brazen Serpent*; *Krishna-Pal, the First Hindoo Convert* (based on the memoir of William Ward, missionary to India); *Heavy Charges Against Sabbath Breakers*; *The Rum-Drinking Christian*; and *The Backslider* (attributed by some to William Wesley). Emerson also became more active in the Marietta Baptist church located four miles north of the town. The secular pursuits of horticulture and education occupied Emerson as well in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Marietta College named him a trustee.

THE MARIETTA GAZETTE

The *American Friend*, successor to Caleb Emerson's *Western Spectator*, served as Marietta's principal newspaper from 1813 until 1833. David Everett, its founding editor, was a New Hampshire school teacher who had composed a piece of doggerel for one of his students that became well known by virtually every pupil in America:

You'd scarce expect one of my age
To speak in public on the stage;
If I should chance to fall below
Demosthenes or Cicero
Don't view me with a critic's eye,
But pass my imperfections by.³¹

Having contracted tuberculosis in New Hampshire, Everett relocated to southern Ohio, seeking a less severe climate. After serving as the *Friend's* editor for eight months, however, he died of his illness at the age of forty-four. The newspaper continued under the editorship of Daniel H. Buell and Royal Prentiss, who was added as a partner in April 1814. Prentiss bought the paper from D. H. Buell and his brother Timothy in 1816, and operated it for the next seventeen years, lengthening its name to the *American Friend and Marietta Gazette* in 1823. David Everett had started the paper as a Democratic-Republican publication, one which supported the administration of James Madison. By the time of Royal Prentiss's involvement, the newspaper was firmly Federalist and therefore more to the liking of Caleb Emerson.

Royal Prentiss, who occupied many city and county offices during his nineteen years with the *American Friend*, laboured diligently to keep the newspaper afloat, performing most of the mechanical tasks associated with its operation himself. Despite the savings such labour engendered, little profit was produced. As a result, Prentiss sold the newspaper to John Delafield and Edward W. Nye in 1833. The new owners dropped the first part of the newspaper's title, publishing it as the *Marietta Gazette*.

Finding the newspaper business as difficult a proposition as Prentiss had (and perhaps not as ready to assume the manual duties entailed), E. W. Nye was negotiating the sale of the *Gazette* with Caleb Emerson by the winter of 1835-36. Emerson, undoubtedly reflecting upon his experience with the *Spectator*, was reluctant to assume sole responsibility.³² Only when he received assurances of support from his twenty-three-year-old son, William Dana Emerson, did he agree to return to journalism.

The newspaper of which Caleb Emerson assumed the management on 7 May 1836 was a four-page, six-column weekly printed by L. J. Knight at No. 3 Green Street. Emerson made clear his editorial intentions in the first two weekly numbers of the *Gazette*. In his first issue, Emerson stressed the importance of the press to the nation. It was the 'common channel of communication between different sections of the country', despite its being regularly abused and degraded by unscrupulous journalists. The publisher, stated Emerson, must be independent and truthful. Of course, newspapers should choose political sides, and the *Gazette* would support the Whigs (successors to the Federalists), because Emerson believed the Democratic presidential candidate Martin Van Buren to be a purveyor of President Andrew Jackson's 'spoils system', which he felt

undermined the general welfare of all citizens. In his coverage of politics, Emerson pledged to avoid bitterness and controversy. In addition, the editor announced his intention to feature more science and art news. Greater variety would be possible, because political freedom now prevailed in the world.³³

Continuing these themes the following week, Emerson advised his readers to shun unprincipled party-run newspapers by quoting from Alexander Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*:

Destroy his fib, of [*sic*] sophistry, - in vain.
The creature's at his dirty work again.

Instead, the editor advised his readers to choose a paper which would present a tableau of 'interesting intelligence, [and] rational amusement' while improving the mind. Emerson called upon his friends to help fill the newspaper's columns with the kind of information subscribers wanted to read, hoping thereby to build circulation.³⁴

Emerson decided to publish the *Gazette* under the same terms as his predecessors - \$2.00 per year in advance, \$2.25 if subscribed to during the year, and \$2.50 if paid at the year's end. No subscriptions would be accepted for less than six months. Advertisements would be inserted three times for \$1.00 and \$0.25 would be charged for each additional insertion. Advertisements would be continued until paid for by the advertiser. Discounts would be available to those who advertised by the year. Subscribers who failed to notify the newspaper of discontinuance would automatically be continued as subscribers.

During the period of his editorship of the *Gazette* (7 May 1836 - 17 November 1837), Emerson would constantly attempt to achieve a balance between the educational/literary and the political. Because the political was inextricably intertwined with news of the greatest national and international importance, there was a tendency for news of a more instructional, practical or simply edifying character to be crowded out from the pages of the newspaper. This was especially true in the weeks before an election when Whig propaganda reigned supreme. Although Emerson made such pragmatic editorial decisions in an apparent attempt to satisfy his more influential supporters, he never stopped apologizing to the farmer and mechanic, nor did he ever abandon the effort to produce a newspaper that would satisfy everyone.

In response to a letter addressed to 'Friend Emerson' by 'Farmer',³⁵ the *Gazette* initiated a regular column entitled the 'Husbandman' consisting of news and advice of interest to the farmer and animal breeder. Topics discussed included production of beet sugar; breeding and fattening of cattle; the practice of burning over ground in preparation for sowing wheat; the damage wrought by the Hessian fly to the wheat crop; and the advantages of Merino sheep.

Similarly, Emerson devoted regular columns to the subjects of education and temperance. The former held forth on the importance of education to freedom and citizenship, the nature of correct moral instruction, and the qualities required of an effective teacher; while the latter attacked all aspects of the liquor trade, offered vivid scenarios of lives ruined by drink, and argued against those who defended moderate use of alcohol.

Emerson's *Gazette* was a better-organized newspaper than was his *Spectator*. The reader was able to discern easily the nature of news occupying each page and column, because sections were clearly labelled: 'Poet's Corner', 'Congress', 'Foreign', 'Marietta' and 'Miscellany'. Approximately half of page three and all of page four were devoted to notices and advertisements, including titles offered for sale by the local bookstore, now operated by D. H. Buell. The editor sampled the stories featured in an ever-expanding list of American periodicals:

the *Portland (Maine) Advertiser*, the *Cincinnati Mirror, Echo, and Gazette*, the *Baltimore Chronicle, and American*, the *American Monthly*, the *Macon Messenger*, the *Zanesville Gazette*, the *Richmond Whig*, the *Raleigh Register*, the *Pittsburgh Advocate* and the *National Intelligencer*. Emerson also regularly featured Charles Davis's popular 'Major Downing's Letters' borrowed from the *New York Daily Express*. They used backwoods humour and common sense to satirize Andrew Jackson and his supporters.

National news coverage centred on the (failed) Whig effort to defeat Martin Van Buren and the Democrats (for which the Panic of 1837 would later be blamed). The speeches of John Quincy Adams and Daniel Webster were prominently featured. Considerable space was devoted to troubles in Texas where Sam Houston and Mexico's Santa Ana confronted each other over Texans' right to keep slaves. Emerson staunchly opposed recognition of an independent Texas or annexation of Texas as a state, and reported Lord Palmerston's speech to the English Parliament on the subject in order to demonstrate international support for his position.³⁶ The attempts of US troops to subdue the Creeks in Florida were also covered.

International news (ten days late) briefly touched upon a variety of stories: 'The Irish question' (featuring excerpts of a Daniel O'Connell speech condemning 'parchment union' with England);¹⁷ the death of William IV and the accession of his eighteen-year-old niece Victoria to the throne of England; France's war in Algiers; Russia's economic problems; insurrection of the privileged 'Mohamedans' in Bosnia;³⁸ and troubles in Spain (with the Carlists) and Portugal (dissolution of the Cortes).

As the question of slavery continued to evade solution, tempers flared and those who would speak out on the issue risked increasingly violent attack. Newspapers, especially those of abolitionist sympathies, were particularly vulnerable. On 30 July 1836 the offices of *The Philanthropist*, an abolitionist organ published by Will Birney in Cincinnati, were attacked and destroyed by an angry mob while the mayor watched. During the publication's two-month tenure in Ohio's 'Queen City', threats and minor vandalism had been experienced. Emerson, while clearly condemning the attack on the newspaper, sought to distance himself from the type of militant abolitionism that might make his paper a target. Devoting four columns of page two to the incident, Emerson declared the confrontation to be of 'unspeakable importance', because it represented an unparalleled rise in mob violence which threatened the basic fabric of the nation. Reprinting extracts from several Cincinnati papers which described the horror in detail, Emerson urged his readers to 'READ-UNDERSTAND-PAUSE-PONDER' the gravity of the situation.³⁹

At the same time, Emerson felt it necessary to attempt to dispel rumours that the *Gazette* was about to become an abolitionist organ. Citing sections one (basic tenets) and six (freedom of the press) of the Ohio Constitution's Declaration of Rights, Emerson declared the right of all the state newspaper publishers to continue their operations, but he also hastened to mention that the *Gazette* would remain a newspaper advocating the views of the Whig party (both pro- and anti-abolitionist), pledged to do no injury to any person or class of people.⁴⁰ While opposed to slavery, militancy - including that of the abolitionists - had no appeal for Emerson.

Although the *Gazette* could not be described as a frivolous publication, Emerson did find occasional space for the curious, the unusual, even the questionable news item. Perhaps the most unusual was a series of articles covering the semi-comprehensible disquisitions of Edward Postlethwayt Page, self-described 'allegorical emperor of the world', whose confusing mixture of astrology, astronomy, geology and numerology was presented in lectures which were quite impossible for most audiences, including *Gazette* readers, to follow. Despite Page's protestations that he had discovered a 'trinity in unity' rather like matter, space and time, Emerson announced

he was discontinuing coverage of astrology.⁴¹ Even he found it inscrutable. Unfazed, Page boldly introduced himself to Daniel Webster during the statesman's visit to Ohio in 1837, and called for universal education and emancipation of the slaves (as reported by Emerson).

Among the less spectacular curiosities covered by the *Gazette* were phrenology (as practiced by Dr Thomas Sim, a pupil of the famed Dr Johann Kaspar Spurzheim), and 'animal magnetism' (or hypnosis) as a cure for nervous complaints and insomnia. Only rarely would Emerson elect to publicize the absurd, as on the occasion he saw fit to repeat the assertions of the *Protestant Vindicator* which declared that Jewesses were more attractive than male Jews because they had accepted Christ as their saviour in Jesus's time.⁴²

Emerson's tenure as *Gazette* editor was beset by personnel and financial difficulties. In August 1836 he dismissed his printers, J. J. and V. C. Knight, complaining that they had interfered with his management of the paper and procrastinated when asked to find other employment.⁴³ Emerson bought out their interest in the paper. Financial problems continued to plague the newspaper publisher. Emerson apparently never reached a satisfactory financial settlement with the previous *Gazette* publisher, Edward W. Nye, for in 1837 one finds him appealing to Edward's father, Col. Ichabod Nye, requesting mediation in the matter. The elder Nye demurred, explaining that his earlier unplanned support of the paper represented more journalistic involvement than he ever hoped to experience again. This did not prevent him, however, from offering (unsolicited) advice to Emerson, urging that the paper become more outspoken and partisan in order to build circulation.⁴⁴ The tone of the *Gazette* did not change.

It does not appear that Caleb Emerson ever found a satisfactory balance between the newspaper he would have preferred to produce - a moderate Whig publication that emphasized freedom and tolerance while serving as a lively forum for useful and practical information on a wide variety of subjects - and the one he was ultimately forced by pragmatic considerations to produce - a dedicated Whig weekly that tried to make room for more varied and thoughtful subject matter. The result was a publication that attempted at times to meet the stated or assumed needs of the readership while devoting most of its space to Whig propaganda whenever political events dictated. After the defeat of the Whigs in the autumn 1836 national election, one detects a malaise in the pages of the *Gazette*. The reader does not discern the same energetic interest in disseminating information on education, agriculture or social problems that Emerson had previously displayed. Instead, the newspaper seemed to fulfil its obligation to report the news in a rather perfunctory manner, dutifully supplying the facts regarding national and international events, and only occasionally stirring emotions or providing insights. Political tempers had cooled in the postelection period, but Emerson did not seem eager to take advantage of the situation.

Emerson was not as dedicated to his newspapers as Royal Prentiss had been. Struggling financially, as every other publisher in Marietta had been, he was not about to set type and run the press himself in order to reduce his overheads. Emerson would rather pursue his other interests if economic circumstances indicated that it was wise to do so. By December 1837 Emerson had made this choice, deciding to sell the *Gazette* to Isaac Maxon, a fervent Whig with previous editorial experience. In choosing Maxon as his successor, however, it appears that Emerson guaranteed that the *Gazette* would become the newspaper he would have liked to produce had he the energy and interest.

Changing the name to the *Marietta Gazette and Washington County Agriculturalist*, Maxon announced that his paper would be more literary and agricultural and less political. After all, 'variety's the spice of life, and gives it all its flavour'.⁴⁵ Maxon filled his newspaper with

essays, anecdotes and homilies on child rearing, marriage and the properly-run household while warning against idleness, irresponsibility and dissolute living. A regular 'Agriculturalist' column bearing the motto, 'Whoever would by agriculture thrive, himself must either hold the plow or drive', featured advice on the cause of decay in peach trees, correct foddering of cows and the preservation of potatoes. Maxon stated his neutrality on the abolition controversy, although he plainly condemned the violent attack on an abolitionist press in Alton, Illinois that had occurred in November.⁴⁶ He conscientiously supported Whig candidates for office, but would not fill his paper with campaign literature.

On balance, the new *Gazette* was less to the liking of Marietta's prominent Whig businessmen than Emerson's version had been. Within twenty months, the town's Whig leadership had begun their own well-financed Whig newspaper, the *Marietta Intelligencer*, with young Beman Gates as editor. Isaac Maxon was forced to sell out two years later.

HISTORY AND LITERATURE

Freed from the pressures of producing the community's newspaper, Caleb Emerson gave serious thought to creating a publication that would accurately reflect the ideals and principles he believed should be the foundation of a vital periodical. Emerson formulated a proposal for 'a new literary and miscellaneous newspaper' to be called 'The Marietta Review'. This literary experiment would attempt to address the question of whether Americans were capable of self-government. An affirmative reply would only be possible, Emerson believed, if the nation's youth could be educated to appreciate the value of intellectual and moral pursuits. As a result, the Review would champion universal education. Citing concern for society's interests as a whole, Emerson declared that the periodical would advance the cause of freedom, including universal emancipation, but not the agenda of any political party. The Review would be printed in quarto form every two weeks on the best medium paper using Brevier type, and offered to subscribers for \$1.00 per year. Publication would begin in 1838, 'if ... encouragement [was] given'.⁴⁷ Apparently, such support was not forthcoming, for the publication never appeared.

Emerson would never again publish or edit a periodical, but he would write articles that would be published, primarily on the subjects of Ohio history and the evils of slavery. Similarly, Emerson would not revive his law practice, but he would serve as Master Commissioner in Chancery, regularly announcing state chancery sales of mortgaged property throughout the 1840s. He would also serve as administrator for several estates. This responsibility entailed travel that afforded him the opportunity to collect historical information and artefacts to be used in the preservation and dissemination of the region's history.

When Beman Gates assumed editorship of the *Marietta Intelligencer* in August 1839, he asked his readers to help him recreate the complete history of the community's newspapers. Three issues later the paper published Caleb Emerson's reply, providing a complete journalistic genealogy beginning with Wyllys Silliman's *Ohio Gazette and Territorial and Virginia Herald* of December 1801. In addition to narrating a rather complete history of Marietta's newspapers, Emerson informed readers of the curious fate of many of the publications' early issues. Emerson himself possessed an imperfect copy of an *Ohio Gazette* first number that had been loaned to him by Francis DeVol, an early Marietta attorney. In turn, Emerson had loaned to a group of Whigs from Xenia, Ohio a complete set of James Gardiner's *Commentator* (1807-08) that had never been returned.⁴⁸

Such common carelessness was on the mind of *Cincinnati Gazette* editor John C. Wright

when he met Caleb Emerson on 17 February 1841 in order to hear a preview of Emerson's forthcoming address to the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio. When he learned that Emerson possessed the original journal of the Ohio Company, Wright suggested it be turned over to the Historical Society for safekeeping. Whether or not Emerson did so, it is clear that he concurred with Wright on the need for an expanded, strengthened and well-supported historical society that would collect and preserve the state's heritage. Emerson's address, as reported by Wright, charged party politics with distorting America's history; called for American authors to write America's social history (much as Shakespeare and Walter Scott had written Britain's); pleaded for creation of a 'log cabin history' that would tell the story of America's backwoodsmen; and stated the need for a history of Ohio's Indians and the settlers' relationship with them. Ohio's historical society had much important work to do, and their efforts needed official support. Ohio legislators had not yet come to appreciate this fact, for, as Wright mentioned, they had recently refused to allow the Historical Society use of their facilities during its anniversary celebration.⁴⁹

In addition to reporting on Emerson's historical address, Wright provided readers with a portrait of Emerson as he appeared at the age of sixty-one, a sketch that was reprinted by Beman Gates in the *Marietta Intelligencer*. Wright saw Emerson as 'an elderly gentleman himself almost a pioneer. His personal appearance, his dress, his manner of speaking, are all old fashioned, an interesting relic of other days - of one who has yielded little of his early formed habits to the encroachments of fashion and the change of later times. He is a gentleman of the Old School, with some eccentricities; but there is an honest, straightforward purpose about him which more than makes amends for these'.⁵⁰

Caleb Emerson's interests and ideals were effectively passed on to his eldest son William, who had assisted his father in the publication of the *Gazette*. William D. Emerson followed in many of his father's footsteps. Admitted to the bar in 1841, he served as Washington County Prosecuting Attorney (1847-48) as his father had (in 1815-21), and exhibited a lifelong interest in education, as a school teacher, officer in the Washington County School Association, and sponsor of literary awards at both Ohio University (his Alma Mater) and Marietta College. William also conducted himself in a manner which appears consistent with the description of his father provided to us by John C. Wright. His written proposal of marriage to Lucy Woodbridge, dated 7 February 1842, would support this contention. Preserved by the Woodbridge family and uncovered by Owen P. Hawley of Marietta College who published it in a 1973 issue of *Tallow Light*, the bulletin of the Washington County Historical Society, the missive is marked by a reserved courtliness belonging to another era: 'The deep interest I feel in your welfare is the only apology I can offer for addressing you in these lines. May I ask if your engagements are such that some portion of that interest can be returned? If not, I feel it due to your merits to give you the opportunity of refusing me the honor of your hand'.⁵¹ Evidently she did, because William never married.

When Caleb Emerson died on 14 March 1853 at the age of seventy-three, he left a legacy characterized by a great concern for learning. If democratic society as represented in a young America was to succeed, its citizens must be educated properly. This entailed formulation and communication of the principles and ideals embodied in American history. Newspapers, providing a snapshot of the world's history at the moment of publication, are capable of significant educational service towards the achievement of such noble goals. This was the basis of Emerson's journalistic interest. He succeeded in providing his community with two worthy publications during the period of his stewardship, but the demands of economic and political necessity required him to compromise his ideals. The result was newspapers that fell short of

what Emerson would have liked to produce. Had the 'Marietta Review' seen the light of day, readers might have had the opportunity to evaluate the true Caleb Emerson. As it is, perhaps the collection of books contained in Emerson's estate best represent the principles he attempted to hold up to his fellow citizens. Among the 132 monographs listed we find the works of Plutarch, Cicero, Shakespeare, Byron, Dickens, Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Macaulay, Granville Sharp and Thomas Jefferson.⁵² Surely Emerson would consider his efforts rewarded should all his fellow citizens come to embrace the ideas represented in these volumes.

NOTES

- 1 *History of Washington County, Ohio* [hereafter cited as *HWCO*], Cleveland 1881, p.119.
- 2 A complete, extended family history is provided in Benjamin Kendall Emerson and George A. Gordon, *Emerson Family, The Ipswich Emersons A.D. 1636-1900. A Genealogy of the Descendants of Thomas Emerson, of Ipswich, Mass. With Some Account of His English Ancestry*, Boston 1900 (photocopy viewed at Washington County Public Library, Local History and Genealogy Collection, Marietta, Ohio).
- 3 *HWCO*, p.119.
- 4 In this capacity Pickering established Marietta, Ohio as a mail delivery location, requesting that the town's first postmaster be appointed in 1794. General Rufus Putnam named Return J. Meigs, Jr who rose to the position of US Postmaster General twenty years later. See *HWCO*, p.359.
- 5 Timothy Pickering to General Rufus Putnam, 14 Oct. 1808, photocopy, Manuscript Collection, Dawes Library, Marietta College.
- 6 Paul Fearing to General Philemon Beecher, 13 Sept. 1809, Manuscript Collection, Dawes Library, Marietta College.
- 7 *HWCO*, p.413.
- 8 For more information on Marietta's newspaper history in general, and the *Marietta Intelligencer* in particular, see Gerald S. Greenberg, 'Beman Gates and the *Marietta Intelligencer* 1839-56', *Publishing History*, 38, 1995, pp.55-75.
- 9 *Western Spectator* [hereafter cited as *WS*], 14 Jan. 1811, p.3.
- 10 *WS*, 21 Dec. 1811, p.3.
- 11 *WS*, 12 Mar. 1811, p.3.
- 12 *WS*, 4 May 1811, p.3.
- 13 *WS*, editorial, 23 May 1812, p.2.
- 14 *WS*, 8 Aug. 1812, p.3.
- 15 *WS*, 2 May 1812, p.1.
- 16 *WS*, 23 July 1811, p.1.
- 17 Philip H. Nicklin to Caleb Emerson, 26 Mar. 1811, Caleb Emerson Family Papers [hereafter cited as *CEFP*], Container 1 Folder 2, microfilm edn, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.
- 18 Caleb Emerson to Artemis Lawyer, 19 Dec. 1810, Manuscript Collection, Dawes Library, Marietta College.
- 19 Andrew Law to Caleb Emerson, 11 Apr. 1811, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 2.
- 20 Philip H. Nicklin to Caleb Emerson, 17 Aug. 1811, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 2.
- 21 Philip H. Nicklin to Caleb Emerson, 27 Jan. 1812, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 2.
- 22 Philip H. Nicklin to Caleb Emerson, 23 Dec. 1812; Caleb Emerson to Philip H. Nicklin, 14 Jan. 1813, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 2.
- 23 J. Cushing to Caleb Emerson, 3 Nov. 1814, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 2.
- 24 Ephraim Wright to Caleb Emerson, 7 July 1817, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 2.
- 25 *American Friend* [hereafter cited as *AF*], 7 Aug. 1813, p.3.
- 26 *AF*, 13 Oct. 1815, p.4.
- 27 *HWCO*, pp.680-1.
- 28 'To the good people of Marietta and vicinity', *CEFP*, Container 3 Folder 1.
- 29 *HWCO*, p.119.
- 30 Noah Davis to Caleb Emerson, 20 Oct. 1829, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 2.
- 31 *HWCO*, p.413.
- 32 Caleb Emerson to William D. Emerson, 20 Feb. 1836, *CEFP*, Container 1 Folder 4.
- 33 *Marietta Gazette* [hereafter cited as *MG*], 7 May 1836, p.3.

- 34 *MG*, 14 May 1936, p.3.
- 35 *MG*, 18 Jun. 1836, p.3.
- 36 *MG*, 21 Oct. 1836, p.1.
- 37 *MG*, 30 July 1836, p.2.
- 38 *MG*, 16 Nov. 1836, p.2.
- 39 *MG*, 13 Aug. 1836, p.2.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p.1.
- 41 *MG*, 17 Mar. 1837, p.3.
- 42 *MG*, 26 May 1837, p.2.
- 43 Caleb Emerson to Messrs. Knight, 8 Aug. 1836, CEF, Container 1 Folder 4.
- 44 Ichabod Nye to Caleb Emerson, 3 April 1837, CEF, Container 1 Folder 4.
- 45 *Marietta Gazette and Washington County Agriculturalist*, 9 Dec. 1837, p.3.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p.2.
- 47 Printed proposal by Caleb Emerson & Co., 1837?, CEF, Container 3 Folder 5.
- 48 *Marietta Intelligencer* [hereafter cited as *MI*], 19 Sept. 1839, p.2.
- 49 *Cincinnati Gazette* [hereafter cited as *CG*], 23 Feb. 1841, p.2.
- 50 *CG*, 23 Feb. 1841, p.2; *MI*, 29 April 1841, p.3.
- 51 Emerson and Gordon, *Emerson Family*.
- 52 Catalogue of Books belonging to the Estate of Caleb Emerson, Mar. 1853, Manuscript Collection, Dawes Library, Marietta College.